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SUBJECT: MEXICO: UNODC REPRESENTATIVE SUGGESTS  
REGIONAL MEETING ON MERIDA

11. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) regional and country representatives recently met and discussed ways to promote greater regional coordination among our Merida partners on combating narco-trafficking with a view to producing more concrete progress. They also exchanged information on projects and trends within Mexico. The UNODC representative suggested a meeting among the Merida countries - possibly at the ministerial level early next year -- to improve strategic coordination, but emphasized that improving national capacities should remain the priority. End Summary.

12. (SBU) The Ambassador met with United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) regional representative, Antonio Mazzitelli (who is stationed in Mexico), December 17 to discuss regional strategies for combating narco-trafficking and other organized crime activities. Mazzitelli was accompanied by his colleague, Rubi Blancas, the UNODC's National Program Officer in Mexico. The Ambassador briefed them on the Merida Initiative, including the four pillars that define our overarching strategic approach, recent senior visits, and local strategies for combating organized crime in Mexico.

13. (SBU) Mazzitelli was concerned that Central American and Caribbean countries were lagging behind in the fight against narco-trafficking and thought that a meeting composed of the Merida countries would help to both energize and improve strategic coordination. He suggested that the meeting take place in New York among countries' permanent representatives to the UN or, alternatively, a meeting at the ministerial level. Mazzitelli stressed the need for countries to expand their national capacities as a priority (as opposed to regional activities) but thought that the kind of meeting he proposed would allow for improved strategic coordination and, possibly, the identification of some specific places where cooperative action might complement national programs.

14. (SBU) Mazzitelli and Blancas explained that

their UN Office took a more hemispheric perspective in the war on drugs. Typically, the UNODC works through regional organizations or agreements such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Central American Integration System (SICA), the Santo Domingo Pact and the Managua Declaration, or through key cooperating states such as Colombia (source), Panama (transit), and Mexico (entrance). Mazzitelli added that in the Caribbean, coordination was more challenging with the mix of English and Spanish speaking countries.

¶5. (SBU) Acknowledging that Mexico could be considered a region in of itself in light of the work and coordination at the state and local level, Mazzitelli believed that it could still provide technical assistance to such countries, pointing to Plataforma Mexico as one item where the UNODC could make a value added contribution. He stressed the need for program management oversight throughout Central America and the Caribbean and mentioned that funding for law enforcement activities could be secured through loans from international banks, with repayment coming from seized assets.

¶6. (SBU) The Ambassador reviewed a number Merida programs, highlighting the fourth pillar's focus on building resilient communities to reduce incentives for youth to join cartels and

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inspiring citizens to become agents of change committed to the rule of law. The Ambassador described a project in Veracruz that would contribute to the creation of a webpage to receive criminal complaints and a Secretary of Health project in Ciudad Juarez that sought to identify the variables causing the high levels of violence racking that city. Mazzitelli and Blancas suggested we consider exploring with Mexican judicial officials the idea of trying cases collectively referring to racketeering cases in the U.S. as a possible model.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: The Ambassador's meeting with UNODC provided an opportunity to consider ways to improve our coordination with regional partners on combating narco-trafficking organizations. While the Ambassador and the UNODC representatives agreed building national capacity needed to remain a priority, they also saw appreciable merit in holding a regional meeting to help Merida recipient countries coordinate their activities better at the strategic level and exchange ideas about how to improve their efforts at the national level. End Comment.

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